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ABSTRACT

After a brief discussion of the concepts underlying the design of a high school district's composition program that emphasizes teacher inservice preparation and writing as process rather than product, this paper develops a theory of learning language skills similar to that used in learning a second language. A distinction is drawn between language acquisition as a natural, holistic, unconscious process and language learning as an extensive, carefully planned process implementing rules, algorithms, paradigms, and programmed exercises. The classroom is described as both a workshop where composition skills are acquired through prewriting, writing, and rewriting and as a laboratory where editing skills are learned. A modified version of Stephen Krashen's monitor theory of second language acquisition is discussed as well as its application in an ongoing study of freshman composition students at the University of Southern California. (AEA)

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From Classroom Practice into Psycholinguistic Theory

In 1975, one of my students (now Dr. Dorothy Augustine of the University of Houston) and I set out to design a composition program for the Huntington Beach (California) Union High School District. This program, now in its fourth year, has been successful as judged by most criteria: District evaluations have indicated that we are getting more than satisfactor results, teachers have become increasingly enthusiastic, and from 1975 to 1978, the District leaped from the 73rd to the 86th percentile on the verbal portion of the California Assessment.[1]

Going into the project, Dr. Augustine and I had some fairly clearcut notions—theories, if you will—in mind.

1. In-Service Preparation: Understanding. Teachers need a conceptual-theoretical background in which to work, else all of their pedagogy is ad hoc. Further, this background must be shared knowledge, i.e., teachers in a school or a district need to know the rationale behind the "official" policy, but the policy itself is not a set of laws, merely a conceptual framework that gives coherence to what goes on within and among individual classrooms. It is important to stress that I am not talking about a syllabus mandated by the District. Furthermore, this framework should square with what we know about how language actually works, i.e.,

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should take account of linguistic, psycholinguistic, learning, and rhetorical theory.

An example. We felt that work in syntactic fluency would be a crucial part of the program, as indeed it has demonstrated itself to be, but we chose not to mandate that teachers should devote X amount of time to fluency exercises with Y students. Rather, we hoped that teachers would grasp the linguistic and psycholinguistic underpinnings of sentence combining and use it when appropriate. (More about both appropriateness and syntactic fluency later.)

In setting forth concept and theory, we were not demanding or even asking that teachers abandon their own practices--only that they understand the what and the why of the program that we were setting forth.

Therefore, it was essential that we organize and conduct extensive in-service preparation, for, as I have argued elsewhere, very few composition teachers have any pre-service preparation, though the situation is gradually changing.

2. In-Service Preparation: Knowhow. Composition teachers need techniques for intervening in the process of writing, and many "old hands" have an array of effective methodology, but many teachers, old and new, concentrate on the written product, "correcting" and grading without paying attention to how the present text can be reformulated or how the next one might be more successfully written. We adopted the following maxim: When you levy a criticism against a student paper, you must always add, "And I'll show you at least one way to do it better."

Again, an example. It is futile to admonish students

to reformulate (revise) and let them have at it. We demonstrate to them in general and specifically that reformulation involves the addition, the deletion, the rearrangement, and the substitution of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs. . . .

We have made an arbitrary division of the composing process into prewriting, writing, rewriting, and editing, and teachers need the knowhow to intervene in every stage of the process. (We realize that our segmenting of the composing process is artificial, but it is strategic.)

3. Scenes: Workshop and Laboratory. Following a hint by Mellon,[2] we felt that the kinds of learning necessary for successful writing could be roughly divided into two categories, the rhetorical and the arhetorical. Rhetorical skills would be learned in the workshop and arhetorical in the laboratory. (In fact, the theories of both Kenneth Burke and Roman Jakobson were very much in our minds.)

In "Developing a Composition Program,"[3] I give the following characterization of the workshop and the lab:

> To characterize the workshop and how it interacts with the lab could best be accomplished with a video tape that would demonstrate, not tell about. However, a picture of the workshop can be presented. Here is a montage of the kinds of things that go on there:
>
> 1. Discussion of and practice with prewriting techniques by the whole class.
> 2. Small group activities of two or three students, e.g., two students reacting to and making suggestions regarding a paper (perhaps a rough draft) produced by a

third student.

3. Composing-on-the-board, with volunteers making attempts to solve a given writing problem, e.g., getting a paper by one member of the class under way effectively.
4. Whole class discussions of one, two, or three dittoed papers produced by class members.
5. Conferencing, the teacher circulating about the class to help individual students with writing problems while the other members of the class work on their papers.
6. Some editing lessons for the whole class, dealing with a limited problem that all have in common.
7. Reformulation exercises, in which all of the class members make suggestions for improving one of their fellows' papers.
8. Class discussion of audience, the adjustment of a given paper for a certain audience.
9. Freewriting.
10. Journal writing.
11. Language games, such as the round-robin sentence, in which students successively add modifiers to a base. . . .
12. Publishing activities. . . .
13. Class development of writing assignments. . . .

The workshop is a messy place, highly charged, purposive in terms of writing something for someone for some reason.

The laboratory should be the best scene for producing optimum users [of editing skills], and, in fact, that has been our experience. . . . The laboratory, as we stress

again and again, is not a place, but a concept. It is a given kind of instruction for certain goals.

The laboratory, then, teaches primarily the skills of editing: punctuation, verb agreement, pronoun reference, and so on.

Our conception of the program--which I have outlined in its barest bones--was soon given a sharper definition by the work of my colleague Stephen Krashen. In August of 1976, Professor Krashen issued his important paper "Second Language Acquisition,"[4] the explanation of his "monitor theory" of language learning. Subsequently, he published "On the Acquisition of Planned Discourse: Written English as Second Dialect."[5] In the following pages, I would like to outline Krashen's monitor model, to show how it influenced our practice, and to demonstrate how our practice leads to an enriched version of the monitor model--from practice into theory.

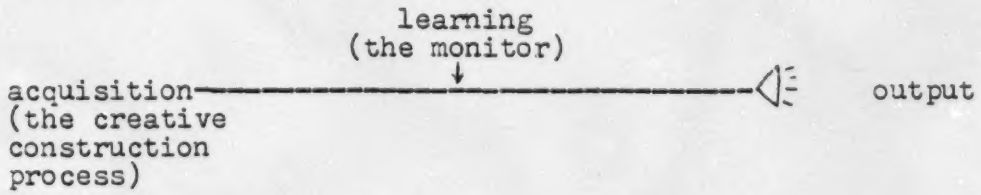
I quote from "Developing a Composition Program":

> The term "learning" is inadequate when one discusses the acquisition of a second language (and we view learning to compose as, in many ways, like learning a second language), for in that acquisition, two quite different processes go on (in the case of most learners, at least). On the one hand, the learner listens and reads and begins to talk and write; <u>input</u> provides the basis for <u>output</u>. Whether in a classroom or on the street of a foreign city, this kind of learning is necessarily rhetorically charged and value-laden. Often there is an audience and a controlling scene to which the learner must try to adjust his or her purpose. In other words, we have all the elements of

natural language learning. . . .

But, of course, we can also turn to paradigms and rule systems which we consciously master. Thus, we memorize the system of German definite articles and, at times, consciously use that knowledge to produce the correct forms in written or spoken German

In second language learning, then, there are two related processes: the "naturalistic" one which often takes place in (results from) a rhetorical situation; and the "artificial" one which results from the desire to learn certain skills of language. The first sort of learning is called by Krashen acquisition, and the second he terms learning. . . . The result of learning is the construction of a monitor which allows the user consciously to regularize or correct output. Thus:



In a sense, the monitor is a low-level device; one cannot consciously learn extremely complex rules of language, but internalizes them through acquisition. (Indeed, not all the "rules" of language can be stated, for example, those concerning audience and scene.) One can, however, learn such rules and paradigms as those which make up the system of articles in German or which constitute standard punctuation in English. . . . .

Now we can redefine workshop as a place where compositional skills (prewriting, writing, rewriting) are

acquired and the laboratory as a place where editing skills are learned [if they have not already been acquired].

When we learned of monitor theory, we were able to schematize simply and usefully thus:

PROCESS	Prewriting	Writing	Rewriting	Editing
"LEARNING" SCENES		Acquisition Workshop		Learning Laboratory

We often say, not totally in jest, that the line between acquisition-worshop and learning-laboratory is the most important line in the profession.

In spite of this neat formulation, however, important questions have arisen. (Or because of this neat formulation!) (1) What can be learned? (2) What must be acquired?

Krashen and I are at odds in regard to learning, but the evidence, I think, is on my side. I believe that editing skills—the skills necessary to make the surface of a text conform to the features of what we call Edited Standard English—are learnable, and I base this conclusion on extensive reports by teachers, on the results of the California Assessment, on the basis of gains on the District's own Test of English Writing Skills (which is almost exclusively editing), and on our observation of the pre- and post-tests of writing which we administer each year.[6] Admittedly I am on shaky ground here, for no compelling evidence indicates that students have not acquired these skills in the general process of their educational maturation, but we can demonstrate that virtually all students show gains in the pre- and post-tests of laboratory skills. What we cannot

demonstrate—and this is the rub—is that the laboratory learning has carryover into the writing situation, though we feel strongly that it does.

Of more theoretical interest than editing is the learning of global skills such as paragraph development. If students can learn such skills, then it must be the case that the elements of these skills are precisely specifiable. That is, we must be able to present algorithms—and I use that term somewhat loosely—the application of which will result in the desired written product. The infamous five-paragraph essay is just such an algorithm, as is the tagmemic concept of the paragraph,[7] which we are using with remedial students. In its barest form, this algorithm asks students to supply a "topic" sentence and to illustrate it two or more times, thus:

Topic	Living near the beach has many advantages.
Illustration	You can go surfing every weekend.
Illustration	The air is not smoggy on the coast.
Illustration	Beach cities are cooler than downtown.

The enriched monitor theory, then, would include not only the learning of specific rules ("Capitalize the first letter in a sentence"), but also of paradigms (such as a chart of the forms of the present tense of be), and of algorithms that apply to paragraphs and whole essays.

The greatest potential for development of the monitor theory lies in the concept of acquisition. In our continual fascinating and friendly go-arounds, Krashen and I meet head-on at one point. He implies in his published work and states flatly in his conversations that acquisition of the ability to write is through "input," i.e., reading. I believe that position

to be untenable. Sticking to the communication jargon, I believe that feedback is as essential as input.

In "On the Acquisition of Planned Discourse," Krashen states:

> It is useful to posit that the well-educated adult native speaker of English has several "dialects" available to him: an unplanned style, which is used primarily in spontaneous conversation, a planned dialect (Pl_1), used for certain kinds of writing (such as narratives and descriptions), and a third code, well-planned discourse (Pl_2), used for written essays of the expository kind. . . .
>
> The freshman English situation is exactly what the [monitor] model predicts. There seem to be at least two kinds of students in freshman English. There is the mature writer at one extreme, the student who has done some reading and has at least acquired Pl_1. Instructions from the teacher on how to write, rules on the use of topic sentences, transitions, etc., are in a sense old information for such students, as they have already acquired them subconsciously. This student, at best, may gain learning where acquisition was already present, a kind of composition appreciation. More commonly, he will wonder why the teacher is explaining the obvious. At the other extreme is what Shaughnessy . . . calls the "severely unprepared freshman", the student who has not acquired Pl_1. . . . For these cases, such instructions are new information, and rules are to be taken as definite orders as to how to perform. When such students do carry out these instructions, the result is often a

wooden, awkward paper, a product of the fact that instructions given in the writing class represent only a small portion of the rules for planned discourse. Discovering and teaching all the rules for Pl_1 and Pl_2 in the classroom are not the answer. The work of Keenan, Loban, Crystal and Davy, and others shows that many of these rules (lexical, structural, pragmatic, semantic, etc.) are extremely complex; their conscious control is beyond the capacity of even our best students.

Krashen does not characteristically become muddled; in fact, he is one of the clearest thinkers I know. But in this instance, he has tripped himself up and in so doing has partially eviscerated his own monitor theory. To explain what I am getting at, I would like to outline some work that is now being undertaken by myself, Krashen, and our colleague Betty Bamberg. We might term this "The Bamberg-Krashen-Winterowd Theory of Freshman Populations."

The data is not yet in, but we posit that at University of Southern California, as at other colleges and universities, freshman composition students will fall into three groups upon entry: (1) those who test out of the course, or would be able to test out if given the opportunity; (2) those who can produce Pl_1 and halting versions of Pl_2; (3) "basic writers," "target students," "remedial students," or whatever term seems least scarifying. The second group can be subdivided into two populations: those who have done extensive pleasure reading during the ages 10-15 and those who have not. (Members of group (1) will invariably have been readers, and members of group (3) almost

invariably will not have been.) For economy, we will refer to the subcategories of group two as R (readers) and NR (non-readers), but it is important to realize that the NR students can read well enough to matriculate and are not "hardcore" cases. The NR students are not typically admitted to the university under special dispensations, as are members of the third category, nor is their lack of experience in reading apparent to their instructors in most of their courses.

We predict that the R students will very quickly--perhaps in as little as one semester--begin to produce Pl_2, and we also predict that follow-up studies will reveal that they did not have extensive writing instruction in high school, if any at all.[8] What they brought with them to the university was "input," what they had never attempted was "output," and what they had never received was "feedback." To be sure, the R students do not need to "learn" rules, for they have acquired these through their reading. What they need to do, however, is to activate this acquired knowledge in a rhetorical situation, in a workshop.

With a certain amount of impish glee, then, I take Krashen to task for his failure to differentiate between the kind of acquisition provided by a writing workshop and the kind of learning that some writing classes try to set forth. In fact, the NR students need more learning than do the R students, but as Krashen points out, most of what must be "learned" about composition is far too complex to be stated specifically as a set of rules.

One might say that the R students are primed for the acquisition of rhetorical skills while the NR are not. What, then, are these rhetorical skills that must be acquired--not

necessarily in a writing workshop, but through some kind of intense feedback? I would enrich monitor theory by bringing rhetorical theory to bear upon it.

The modification of Krashen's work through rhetorical theory is, I think, necessary, but it would be the subject of a much longer paper than this one, which is already extending itself pages beyond what I had originally envisioned. One microcosmic example (drawn from work that I am doing with Dr. Dorothy Augustine) must suffice.

From the standpoint of my enriched monitor theory, we would say that a student who has not acquired the ability to produce a sentence like the following may learn to do so, perhaps through exercises in syntactic fluency or pattern practice.

1. I claim that the fuel shortage is a capitalist conspiracy.

From the standpoint of rhetoric, however, we might say that the sentence (in context) might involve problems of ethos, pathos, and logos. If Hearer (H) does not accept the authority of Speaker (S), an argument ad hominem may ensue:

2. H: You've always been a lousy communist.
   S: I have not! I'm just a socialist.

The problem here regards ethos, the character of the speaker. If it turns out that S misjudges the nature of H, nothing will result from the opening statement:

3. H: So what are you telling me for? I've been making that same claim to you for six months.
   S: Yeh, I guess I wasn't thinking.

The opening statement has misfied on the basis of pathos.

The argument ad rem--the only real argument--comes about

when there is the possibility of negating a proposition (pace Kenneth Burke), that is, when the focus is on logos. Thus,

4. S: I claim that the fuel shortage is a capitalist conspiracy.

   H: It is not a capitalist conspiracy, for Atlantic-Richfield is spending millions of dollars to promote fuel economy.

And the dialectic has begun.

The rhetorical force of the performative verb is also worth considering, for rhetorical force--as opposed to intention--seems to constitute what Kenneth Burke calls "attitude"[9] and certainly contributes to the hearer's sense of rhetorical stance and tone. A "claim" is stronger than a "statement" and not so strong as an "avowal."

Though ethos, pathos, and logos (with all that they imply, which is a very great deal) are "messy" concepts, not amenable to tidy formulation, they are nonetheless real. The skills that could be characterized as "ethical," "pathetic," and "logical" can only be acquired--which means attempt and response, in other words, a writing workshop or its equivalent.

Finally, a concern which for some time I called Sentence-Combining (SC); growing tired of that term (and of the whole subject, for that matter), I changed to Syntactic Fluency (S-F). Being bored to death at this point, I have chosen the term Sentence Manipulation (S-M). Though S-C/S-F/S-M is not a conceptually rich aspect of our field, it is enormously important, and from our practice with it in Huntington Beach, we have developed one further modification of the monitor model.

In our original plans for the Huntington Beach composition program, Dr. Augustine and I firmly planted sentence combining in the laboratory. It was programmatic and arhetorical, we thought;

it was a skill to be learned by those students with a deficit. Very soon, we discovered that in practice, our best teachers were bringing sentence combining into the workshops, in the form of language games, the writing of parodies, and so on. What we began to realize is that with some students (perhaps those whom we would characterize as readers), the fluency exercises very quickly activated a competence which must have been there all along, for the rapidity with which these youngsters increased their stylistic options and hence sophistication could not be attributed to the painfully slow processes that learning such complexities must entail.

On the other hand, we find that some students need extensive, carefully planned work in sentence combining in the laboratory. We propose that these students are learning--not via rules or any kind of descriptive statements, but by doing, though not in the "natural," "holistic," "unconscious" way that characterizes Krashen's acquisition. There seems to be a middle ground between acquisition and learning and between workshop and laboratory, and sentence combining, we have discovered, is one bridge.

A revised monitor theory--the result of experience and rhetorical theory--might, in brief, look like this:

Acquisition: the "learning" of the skills of ethos, pathos, and logos through input and feedback.

Learning: the "learning" of arhetorical skills through rules, algorithms, paradigms, and programmed exercises.

Put more simply, acquisition takes place rhetoricallly, and learning takes place arhetorically. That, I think, is a significant contribution to the work that Krashen began so ably and that has been so valuable to me and my colleagues.

Footnotes

[1]The program was not designed specifically to raise scores on grammar-usage tests; hence our gains on the California Assessment were a bonus of sorts--but very impressive to the district's administration and board. The following quotation from the 1978-79 Ninth Grade Writing Program evaluation report shows something of the results of in-house monitoring:

> The data presented in this report show that, on the average, posttest writing scores were substantially higher than pretest writing scores. The gains were much higher among the students showing low pretest performance. This may, in part, be accounted for by normal regression effects. However, the 1978-79 gains for this group are considerably higher than those for 1976-77 comparable group, suggesting a greater program impact. The same conclusion holds for the total ninth grade population.

[2]John C. Mellon, Transformational Sentence Combining: A Method for Enhancing the Development of Syntactic Fluency in English Composition (Urbana: NCTE, 1969).

[3]Proceedings of the 1979 Convention of the Canadian Council of Teachers of English (Akron: University of Akron, forthcoming). The title of the volume is yet to be announced.

[4]Stephen D. Krashen, "Second Language Acquisition," Personal Viewpoints on Aspects of ESL, ed. M. Burt and others (New York: Regents, 1976). I quote from an expanded MS version of the paper.

[5]Krashen, "On the Acquisition of Planned Discourse: Written English as a Second Dialect," Proceedings of the Claremont Reading

Conference (Claremont, Cal.: 1978).

[6]The writing tests are holistically scored essays, in general like those administered by the California State University and Colleges system. Scoring is guided by a rubric, and each paper is read at least twice.

[7]A. L. Becker, "A Tagmemic Approach to Paragraph Analysis," The Sentence and the Paragraph (Urbana: NCTE, 1966).

[8]Our predictions have been partially verified by a study that a graduate student, Ronald Kimberling, carried out.

[9]In a discussion with graduate students at the University of Southern California, Burke says that attitude—with which he would now expand his Pentad into a hexad—encompasses illocutionary force.